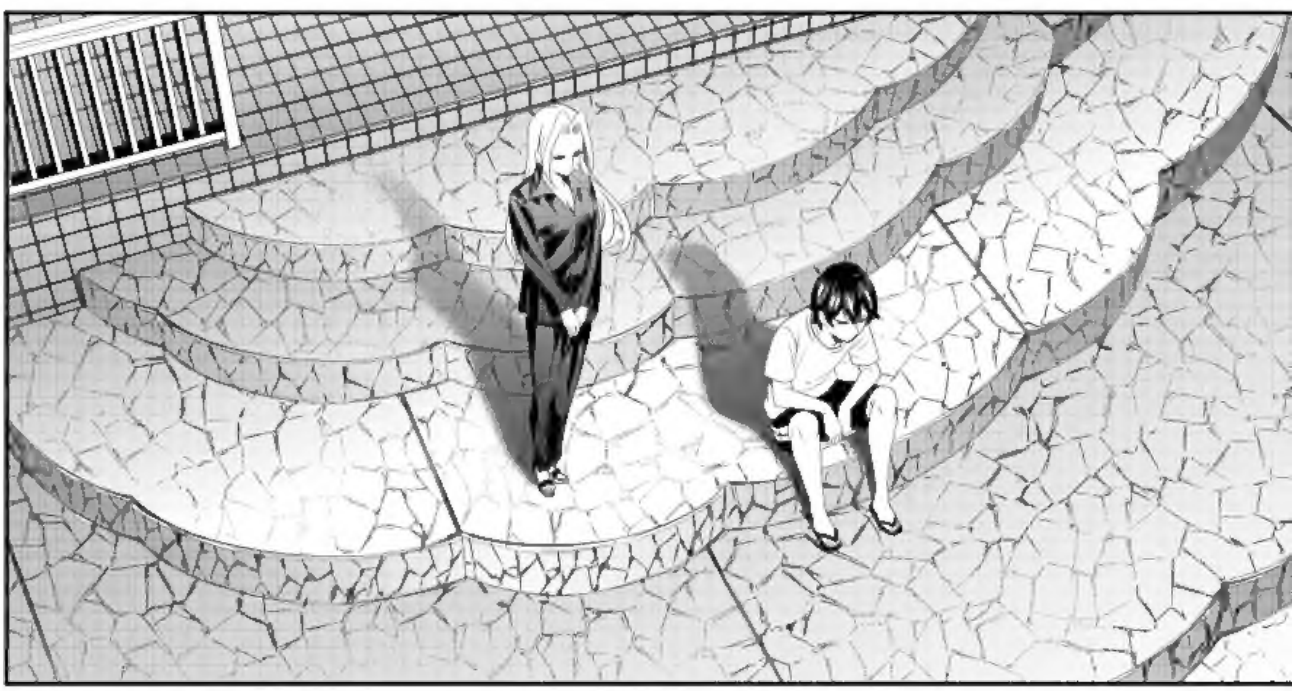
THE CAFÉ TERRACE AND ITS GODDESSES

#144 The Lady-in-Waiting is Next in Line

FWSHHH



UH...

...YES.
BUT I JUST COULDN'T THINK OF WHERE TO START.
YOU'VE BEEN KEEPING QUIET FOR A WHILE NOW...
BUT DIDN'T YOU HAVE SOMETHING YOU WANTED TO TALK TO ME ABOUT?
AH, THAT'S RIGHT. FIRST...
...
...YEAH.
...I HAVE SOMETHING THAT I MUST APOLOGIZE TO YOU FOR.

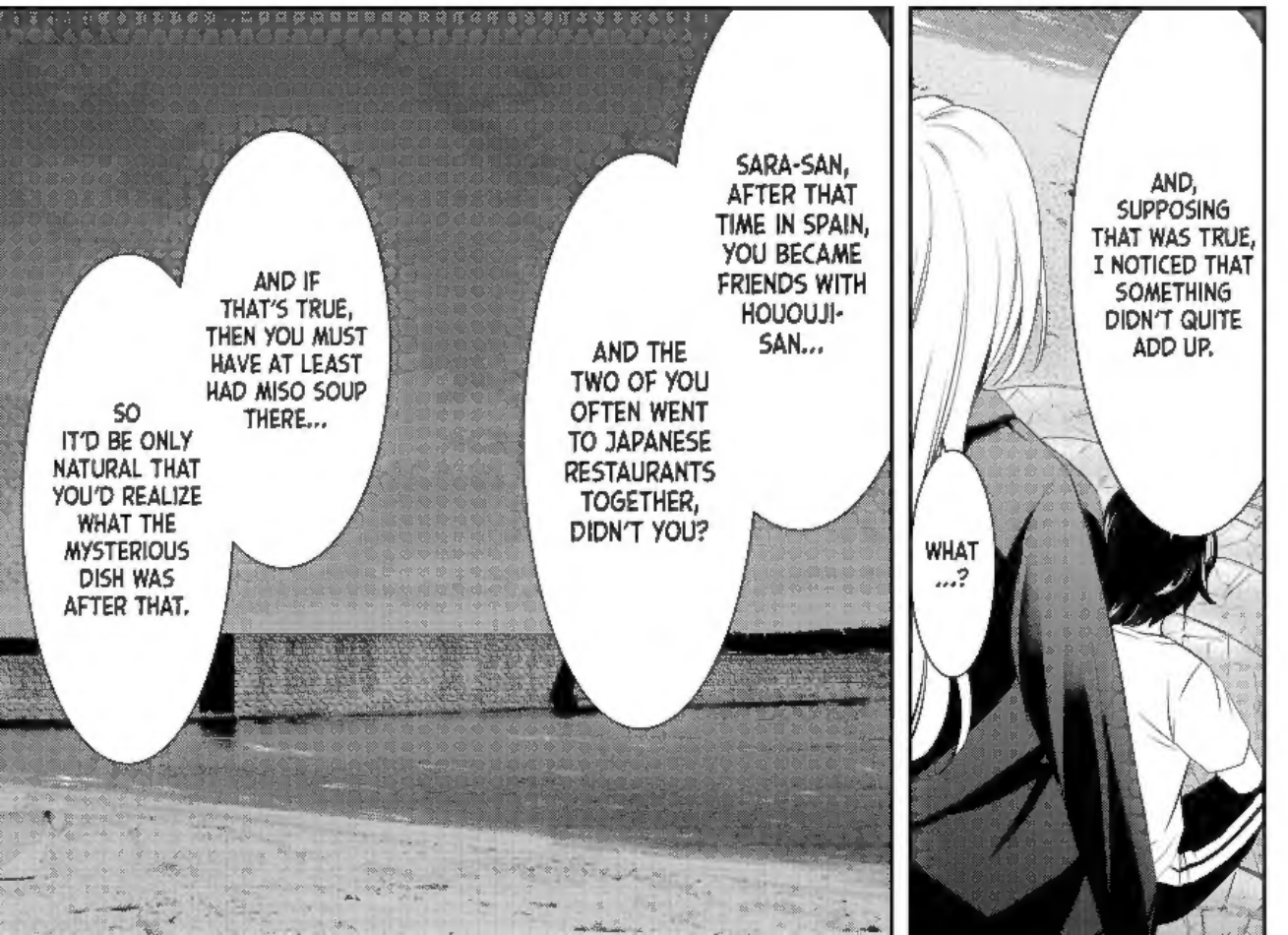
WE WERE RIGHT ABOUT THE OJIYA, WEREN'T WE?
IT REALLY *WAS* THAT MYSTERIOUS DISH OF GRANDMA'S.

...!

...OR RATHER, SARA-SAN...
...YOU ALREADY...
KNEW WHAT IT WAS ALL ALONG, DIDN'T YOU?

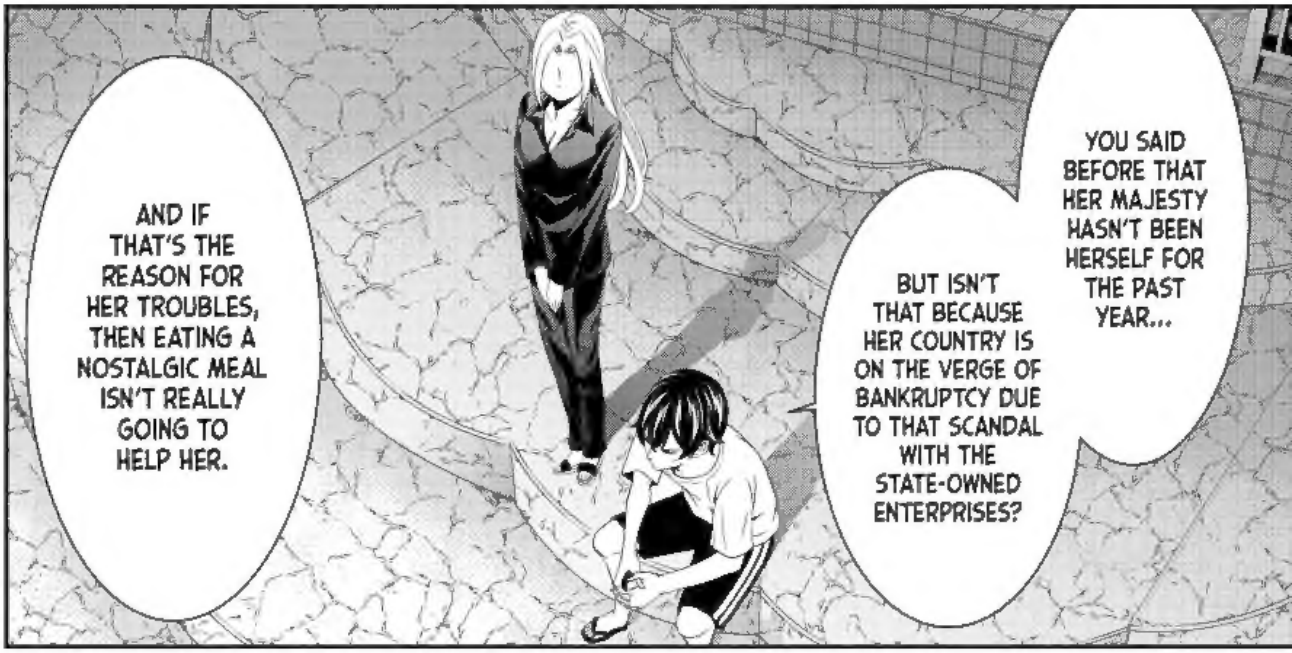
I KNOW GRANDMA'S PERSONALITY BETTER THAN ANYONE.
SO I WAS ALMOST CERTAIN THAT IT WAS THE RIGHT DISH.
AND YET YOU SAID THAT IT WASN'T THE ONE.

SO IT GOT ME THINKING...
...
...WHAT IF THIS PERSON ISN'T TELLING THE TRUTH?


AND, SUPPOSING THAT WAS TRUE, I NOTICED THAT SOMETHING DIDN'T QUITE ADD UP.
WHAT ...?
SARA-SAN, AFTER THAT TIME IN SPAIN, YOU BECAME FRIENDS WITH HOUOUJI-SAN...
AND THE TWO OF YOU OFTEN WENT TO JAPANESE RESTAURANTS TOGETHER, DIDN'T YOU?
AND IF THAT'S TRUE, THEN YOU MUST HAVE AT LEAST HAD MISO SOUP THERE...
SO IT'D BE ONLY NATURAL THAT YOU'D REALIZE WHAT THE MYSTERIOUS DISH WAS AFTER THAT.

IN WHICH CASE, THE FACT THAT YOU DIDN'T TELL OLIVIA...
...SUGGESTS THAT YOU HAD OTHER REASONS FOR COMING TO JAPAN.

...


YOU SAID BEFORE THAT HER MAJESTY HASN'T BEEN HERSELF FOR THE PAST YEAR...
BUT ISN'T THAT BECAUSE HER COUNTRY IS ON THE VERGE OF BANKRUPTCY DUE TO THAT SCANDAL WITH THE STATE-OWNED ENTERPRISES?
AND IF THAT'S THE REASON FOR HER TROUBLES, THEN EATING A NOSTALGIC MEAL ISN'T REALLY GOING TO HELP HER.

UNLESS OLIVIA MARRIED...
...SOME RICH GUY FROM ANOTHER COUNTRY.

...I SEE.
SO YOU KNEW...
...THAT OLIVIA-SAMA WAS TO BE MARRIED.
I FOUND A NEWS ARTICLE ABOUT IT FROM A WHILE AGO.
IT SEEMED THAT SHE'LL BE MARRYING A PRINCE FROM A NEIGHBORING COUNTRY.
AND THAT THE CEREMONY'S ALREADY BEING PLANNED FOR NEXT MONTH.
WITH THAT, THE KINGDOM OF SAMMELHEIM WILL BE SAVED.
OLIVIA MUST BE WELL AWARE OF THAT.
IT DOESN'T MATTER WHETHER SHE LIKES THE MAN SHE'S MARRYING OR NOT.
SHE HAS NO CHOICE BUT TO GO AHEAD WITH IT.

SO THAT'S WHY YOU PUT A BODY DOUBLE IN PLACE.
YOU WANTED TO MAKE SURE SHE HAD AS MUCH FUN AS POSSIBLE, UNTIL THE VERY END OF HER STAY HERE.
IN A COUNTRY AS FAR AWAY AS JAPAN, SHE COULD ENJOY LIFE AS A NORMAL GIRL.
HER FIRST AND LAST MOMENT OF FREE TIME BEFORE SHE MARRIES.

YOU'RE THE ONE WHO SUGGESTED THAT SHE COME TO JAPAN, AREN'T YOU, SARA-SAN?
GIVING HER REASONS LIKE COOKING AND MEETING HER FIANCÉ AND SUCH.

...IS THAT WHY...
...YOU WENT AS FAR AS TO CLOSE YOUR SHOP WHILE WE WERE HERE?
YEAH... WELL, IT WAS ALL JUST A THEORY ON MY PART.
BUT I'M RIGHT, AREN'T I? THAT'S WHY YOU CAME TO JAPAN.
...

NO...
YOU'VE GOT IT COMPLETELY WRONG.

WHAT?

...

...

HEH HEH HEH...
PFFT.

...HUH?

SO WHAT I SAID JUST NOW WAS TRUE, THEN?
YES, PARTLY.

... PARTLY ?

FORGIVE ME... I WAS A LITTLE IRRITATED BY YOUR SMUG FACE, HAYATO-SAN.
SO I JUST WANTED TO TAKE YOU DOWN A PEG OR TWO ONE MORE TIME.
WELL THAT WAS A LITTLE BLUNT.

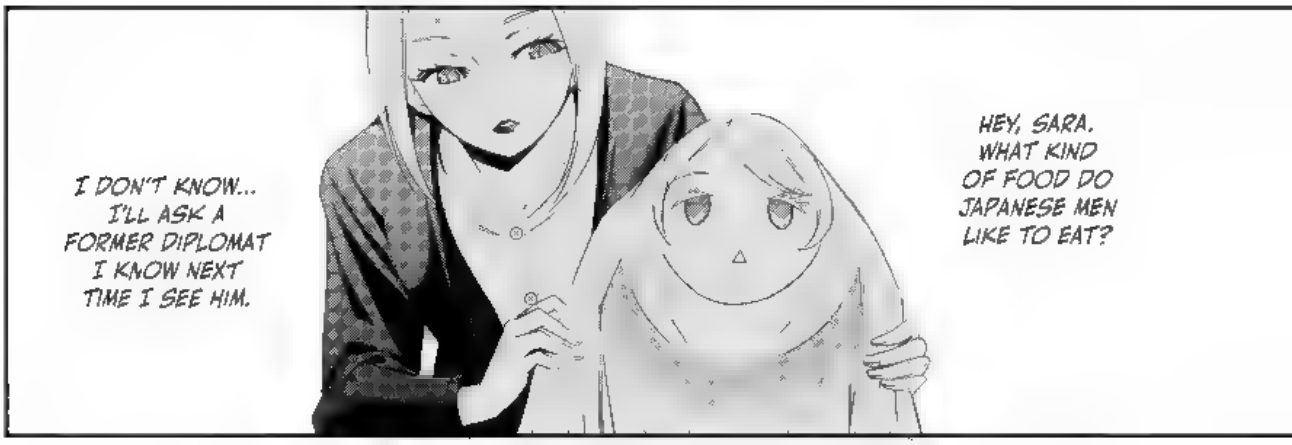
AS I TOLD YOU WHEN WE FIRST GOT HERE, THE REASON I BROUGHT OLIVIA-SAMA HERE...
...WAS TO HAVE HER MEET YOU, HER FIANCÉ, HAYATO-KUN.

YES... OLIVIA-SAMA HEARD ABOUT IT ONCE WHEN SHE WAS YOUNG.
WHILE CHATTING WITH HER MAJESTY.
SHE TOLD HER THAT SHE MIGHT HAVE A FIANCÉ IN A COUNTRY CALLED JAPAN.

...WHA?
YOU MEAN YOU WERE SERIOUS ABOUT THAT?

SINCE THEN, OLIVIA-SAMA WOULD OFTEN ASK THINGS LIKE...

HEY, SARA. WHAT KIND OF PERSON IS MY FIANCÉ?
WELL, WE DON'T EVEN KNOW IF CHEF KASUKABE'S GRANDCHILD IS A BOY OR NOT YET, DO WE?


HEY, SARA. WHAT KIND OF FOOD DO JAPANESE MEN LIKE TO EAT?
I DON'T KNOW... I'LL ASK A FORMER DIPLOMAT I KNOW NEXT TIME I SEE HIM.

IF I EVER GET TO MEET HIM...
I WILL MAKE THE BEST DISHES FOR HIM.
...AND SO...
...SHE HAS BEEN THINKING ABOUT YOU THIS WHOLE TIME.

SO I CONTACTED HOUOUJI-SAN, AND THAT'S WHEN I FOUND OUT.
HER MAJESTY SAID "I WANT TO EAT THAT DISH AGAIN."
AND THEN ONE DAY, IT HAPPENED.

...ABOUT YOU, HAYATO-SAN.
I FOUND OUT...

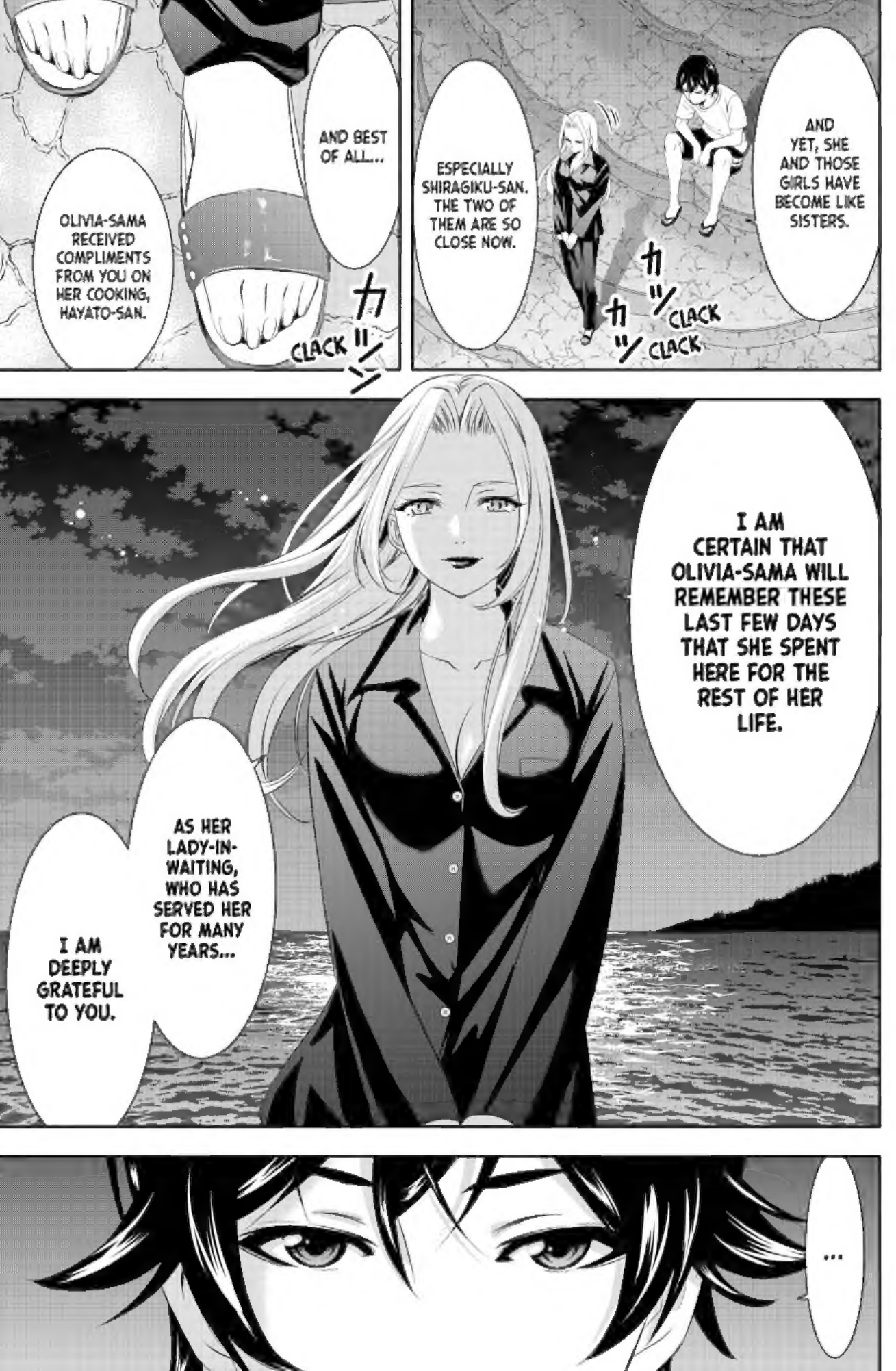
SHE WAS SO LOOKING FORWARD TO MEETING YOU ALL THIS TIME.
DON'T YOU FEEL SORRY FOR HER?
... WELL, YES, BUT...

IT HAD ALREADY BEEN DECIDED WHO SHE WAS GOING TO MARRY, RIGHT?
BUT...WHY WOULD YOU EVEN TELL OLIVIA THAT?

SO I SUGGESTED TO HER THAT SHE COME AND MEET YOU, HER FIANCÉ.
I TOLD HER THAT WE'D KEEP IT A SECRET FOR THE MOMENT...
AND USE FINDING OUT MORE ABOUT CHEF KASUKABE'S DISH AS OUR EXCUSE FOR GOING.

BUT DIDN'T YOU END UP JUST SPILLING THAT SECRET ALL OF A SUDDEN?
WELL, YES... I DID *INTEND* TO KEEP IT A SECRET...

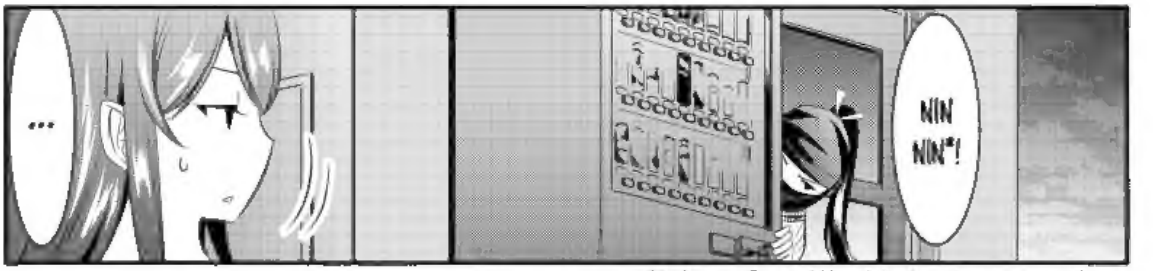
BUT WHEN WE CAME TO THE CAFÉ AND SAW FIVE PRETTY GIRLS ALREADY WORKING THERE...
I WANTED TO HELP DIS-COURAGE THEM, FOR OLIVIA-SAMA'S SAKE, SO I TOLD YOU ALL THE REAL PURPOSE OF OUR VISIT.
HOUOUJI-SAN THOUGHT THAT I WAS JUST JOKING, THOUGH.
WELL OF COURSE SHE WOULD!


AND YET, SHE AND THOSE GIRLS HAVE BECOME LIKE SISTERS.
ESPECIALLY SHIRAGIKU-SAN. THE TWO OF THEM ARE SO CLOSE NOW.
CLACK
CLACK
AND BEST OF ALL...
OLIVIA-SAMA RECEIVED COMPLIMENTS FROM YOU ON HER COOKING, HAYATO-SAN.
CLACK
I AM CERTAIN THAT OLIVIA-SAMA WILL REMEMBER THESE LAST FEW DAYS THAT SHE SPENT HERE FOR THE REST OF HER LIFE.
AS HER LADY-IN-WAITING, WHO HAS SERVED HER FOR MANY YEARS...
I AM DEEPLY GRATEFUL TO YOU.
...

I HEARD EVERYTHING.

...SHI-RAGIKU.

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN THERE...?



*A phrase often said by ninja characters in pop culture.

HUH?
BUT AFTER OVERHEARING THAT STORY...
THERE'S ONE LAST THING THAT I ABSOLUTELY MUST DO.
AS THE LAST APPRENTICE OF THE THREE STAR CHEF, SACHIKO KASUKABE...
...I WANT TO HAVE ONE MORE COOKING SHOWDOWN!